

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

UnGovernment to soon set up helpline number 10588 for pregnant women

- Government will soon set up a toll free number 10588 to provide relevant information and guidance directly to the pregnant women.
- The toll free number will be functional at Mother and Child Tracking Facilitation Centre (MCTFC) in New Delhi.
- The caller can give a missed call at this number and the operator will call back within 90 seconds to address their queries. MCTFS is a centralized web-based application which captures the name based data of pregnant women and children. It was set up at National Institute of Health and Family Welfare in 2014

India to host 5th Global Conference on Cyber Space in 2017

- India will be hosting the fifth edition of the Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS) in 2017 in which over 100 countries are expected to participate.
- GCCS will deliberate on issues related to promotion of cooperation in cyberspace, to enhance cyber capacity building and norms for responsible behaviours in cyberspace.
- The UK had hosted the first GCCS in 2011 followed by Budapest in 2012, South Korea in 2013 and the Netherlands in 2015

Union Government launches Google Toilet Locator app

- Union Minister Venkaiah Naidu launched 'Google Toilet Locator' mobile application to help people locate the nearest toilet.
- It was launched as part of the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' as well as 'Digital India Mission'. The app integrates location of all public toilets even those in private buildings with Google maps. Initially the app will have details on location of all toilets in Delhi-NCR and Madhya Pradesh and later it will be followed by other states soon.

Union Cabinet approves ordinance to pay salaries by cheques

- The Union Cabinet has approved a draft ordinance to empower states and allow industries to pay workers' wages digitally, through a direct bank transfer to accounts or by cheque in a bid to encourage cashless transactions.
- The draft ordinance proposes changes to the Section 6 of the Payment of Wages Act, 1936. It will allow industries to pay wages to workers earning up to Rs. 18,000/ month, without taking their explicit consent as required under present Act.
- However, wage payment through the banking system will only be optional, until State governments or Union Government come up with a notification for specific industries since Labour is in the concurrent list.
- The present law (1936 Act) states that all payment of wages should be in cash. Under it has mandatory provision asking employers to obtain written permission of the worker to pay either by cheque or by

crediting wages to his or her bank account.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

In Japan approves biggest defence budget

- Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's cabinet approved 5.13 trillion yen (\$43.6 billion) in defence spending for the fiscal year starting in April 2017. It is Japan's highest annual defence budget announced so far. It is up by 1.4% from the initial budget for the current fiscal year.
- Under the new budget, Japan aims to beef up its ballistic missile defences, allocating funds for a new interceptor missile under joint development with the United States.
- It also earmarks funds to dispatch extra personnel to the Philippines and Vietnam to increase gathering and sharing of information. The funds have been increased monitoring operations and to maintain mastery of air and sea to counter attacks against "island areas" which are disputed territory. Separately, Japanese Coast Guard will increase security around the islands by allocating a record 210 billion yen, which includes two new patrol ships and the hiring of 200 more personnel.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY CURRENT AFFAIRS

Union Government revises North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy

- The Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) has revised North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIP), 2007. The revision of policy stipulates mandatory disbursement of subsidies payable to all industrial units in northeast through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mechanism by Chief Controller of Accounts (Industry).
- Industrial units which had commenced production on or after December 1, 2014 and on or before March 31, 2017 will be eligible for incentives as per the revised norms of subsidy. It will also include existing units which go in for substantial expansion and commence commercial production on or before March 2017.
- The subsidy for the existing and new industrial units going for substantial expansion will be limited Rs 3 crore per industrial unit operating in services sector and Rs 5 crore per industrial unit operating in manufacturing sector.
- The limit for automatic approval of subsidy at the rate of 30% of the investment in plant and machinery will continue to be upto Rs 1.5 crore per unit. In case for grant of capital investment subsidy higher than Rs 1.5 crore and upto a maximum of Rs 5 crore will be approved by empowered committee chaired by Secretary, DIPP.

RBI opposes proposal to set up separate payments regulator

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opposed a move to establish a separate entity to regulate payments and settlements as recommended by Ratan Watal Committee for Digital Payments.
- The 11-member committee was notified in September 2016 by the Union Finance Ministry to review existing payment systems in country and recommend appropriate measures for encouraging Digital Payments.

5th India-Arab partnership conference held in Muscat, Oman

- The fifth edition of the India-Arab Partnership Conference was held in Muscat, Oman from December 14 to 15, 2016. Theme of the conference was 'Partnership towards innovation and cooperation in IT'.
- The aim of the conferences was to enhance flow of investments from both sides, accelerate the investment projects of prioritized sectors, provide conducive environment for export promotion. It discussed several important topics in fields of technology, innovation, health, pharma sector, clean technology, renewable energy, food security, education, skills development and tourism sector.
- Around 500 representatives including from the Arab League and Indian government officials, businessmen, investors and academicians participated in the conference. Other collaboration partners of the conference included Federation of Arab Businessmen (FAB) and the General Union of Arab Chambers of Commerce and Industry and Agriculture (GUCCIA).
- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Oman Chamber of Commerce were the coordinating agencies. Besides, nine other chambers from the Arab States also participated.

RBI keeps key rates unchanged in fifth bi-monthly monetary policy review

- The Reserve bank of India (RBI) in its fifth bi-monthly monetary policy review for year 2016-17 has kept key rates unchanged. Decision in this regard was taken by RBI's six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) headed by Governor Urjit Patel. This decision was taken on the basis of an assessment of the current and evolving macroeconomic situation.
- The policy repo rate was kept unchanged citing global and domestic uncertainties that posed upside risks to inflation. The MPC also has cut Gross Value Added (GVA) growth estimates for the economy in the fiscal year ending March 2017 to 7.1% from 7.6% earlier.
- Thus, RBI has retained its "accommodative" monetary policy stance with the objective of achieving consumer price index (CPI) inflation at 5% by Q4 of 2016-17 and the medium-term target of 4% within a band of +/- 2 per cent, while supporting growth.

Union Government launches Lucky Grahak Yojana, Digi Dhan Vyapar Yojana to promote digital payments

- The Union Government has launched Lucky Grahak Yojana to encourage consumers and Digi Dhan Vyapar Yojana to encourage merchants for transition to digital payments. These award based schemes were launched by the NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog, government's policy think-tank.
- These schemes aim to give cash awards to consumers and merchants who utilize digital payment instruments for personal consumption expenditures. They will specially focus on bringing the poor, lower middle class and small businesses into the digital payment fold.
- Transactions using USSD, UPI, RuPay and AEPS will only be covered under these schemes. Digital payments made through credit cards and e-wallets won't be covered. To ensure focus on small transactions incentives will be restricted to transactions within the range of Rs 50 and Rs 3000.
- The winners shall be identified through a random draw of eligible Transaction IDs by software to be especially developed by NPCI for this purpose.

AWARDS

Kaisa Matomaki, Maksym Radziwill win 2016 SASTRA Ramanujan award

- Kaisa Matomaki and Maksym Radziwill have been jointly won the 2016 SASTRA-Ramanujan award for mathematics for their 'revolutionary' collaborative work on short intervals in number theory.
- Their mathematical work dwells on properties of numbers in "short intervals." The two mathematicians worked with Fields medallist Terence Tao in making a breakthrough on the Chowla conjecture.
- They were presented with this prestigious award at inauguration of International Conference on Number Theory at SASTRA University at Kumbakonam. Kaisa Matomaki from Finland's University of Turku is first woman to receive this prize since it was instituted in 2005.

2016 Sahitya Akademi Award winners announced

The Sahitya Academy has announced the names of 24 poets and authors who will be conferred the prestigious 2016 Sahitya Akademi Award. This award has recognised premier works in 24 Indian languages that includes 8 books of poetry, 7 books of short stories, 5 books of novels, 2 books of criticism and 1 book each of essays and play.

- Play: Swarajbir (Punjabi).
- Essay: Narsinghaprasad Bhaduri (Bengali).
- Criticism: Aziz Hajini (Kashmiri) and Nizam Siddiqui (Urdu).
- Short stories: Chahatrapal (Dogri), Shyan Darihare (Maithili), Moirangthem Rajen (Manipuri), Asaram Lomate (Marathi), Paramita Satpathy (Odia), Bulaki Sharma (Rajasthani) Vannadhasan (Tamil).
- Poetry: Jnan Pujari (Assamese), Anju (Bodo), Kamal Vora (Gujarati), Prabha Varma (Malayalam), Sitanath Acharya (Sanskrit), Gobinda Chandra Majhi (Santhali), Nand Javeri (Sindhi) and Papineni Sivasankar (Telugu).

PEOPLE IN NEWS

Anil Dhasmana appointed as new chief of Research and Analysis Wing

- The Union Government has appointed senior IPS officer Anil Dhasmana as new chief of Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), India's external intelligence agency.
- He succeeds Rajinder Khanna who completes his two year tenure on 31 December 2016. He will have tenure of 2 years.

Rajiv Jain appointed as new chief of Intelligence Bureau

- The Union government has appointed senior IPS officer Rajiv Jain as the new chief of Intelligence Bureau (IB).
- He succeeds Dineshwar Sharma and shall have two years term. He is IPS officer of the 1980-batch of Jharkhand-cadre. He had joined the IB in 1989 as assistant director. Since then he has worked in different

capacities including the sensitive Kashmir desk. He had handled various assignments as chief of Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIB), name given to IB units in state capitals.

- He had headed the Ahmedabad SIB (from 2005 to 2008) and later in Delhi SIB (from 2008 to 2012) which is considered politically sensitive. He was advisor to previous NDA government's interlocutor on Kashmir K C Pant when talks were held with separatist leaders. He is recipient of President's Police Medal.

SPORTS CURRENT AFFAIRS

Cristiano Ronaldo wins 2016 FIFA Ballon d'Or Award

- Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo (31) from Portugal has won the prestigious 2016 FIFA Ballon d'Or Award. He has earned this title of world's best football player for fourth time.
- Earlier he had won the Ballon d'Or in 2008, 2013 and 2014. In this year's competition, Barcelona's Lionel Messi (Argentina) finished second and Atletico Madrid's Antoine Griezmann (France) third in the vote.

Usain Bolt, Almaz Ayana crowned 2016 IAAF World Athlete of the year award

- Sprint king Usain Bolt from Jamaica has been awarded the 2016 IAAF World Athlete of the Year award in male category for sixth time.
- Earlier he had won it in 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013. He was rewarded for his blistering performance in 2016 season in which he won three gold medals (100m, 200m and 4x100m relay) at the 2016 Rio Olympics.
- Bolt had won three gold medals, each in the 100 meters, 200 meters and 4x100 meters at the Rio Olympics, repeating his feats of the 2012 London Games and in Beijing in 2008.
- Almaz Ayana of Ethiopia won the award in women's award category. She was presented with the award for her world-record run to win Olympic gold medal in the 10,000 meters. She is the third Ethiopian woman to win this award following Genzebe Dibaba (2015) and Meseret Defar (2007).

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

China launches TanSat satellite to monitor global carbon emissions

- China successfully launched TanSat, a global carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitoring satellite to understand the effects of climate change.
- It was launched on board of Long March-2D rocket from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China's Gobi Desert. It was the 243rd mission of the Long March series rockets. With this, China became third country after Japan and United States to have its own satellite to monitor greenhouse gases (GHGs).
- TanSat will thoroughly examine global CO₂ levels every 16 days, accurate to at least 4 ppm (parts per million). It weighs 620-kg and will be located in sun synchronous orbit about 700 kms above the earth. It

has three-year mission life. It will thoroughly monitor the concentration, distribution and flow of CO₂ levels every 16 days, accurate to at least 4 ppm (parts per million) in the atmosphere.

- The satellite will help understanding of climate change and provide China's policy makers with independent emissions data in first-hand and share it with researchers worldwide. It will give China a louder voice on climate change, carbon reduction negotiation and bigger say on carbon trading

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Parliamentary committee report highlights alarming rise in forest fires

- According to report submitted by Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology, there is alarming rise in forest fires across India.
- It says that the number of forest fires have touched 24,817 in 2016 from 15,937 fires in 2015. It shows alarming rise 55% in the past year.
- The report primarily focuses on the prevention and containing of fires in the Himalayan forests spread across Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir.